

## **Busted**

by mazaher

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How it was that Jack Twist was found to be "too busted up" to be drafted for Vietnam.

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There is a long single file of young men shivering along the whitewashed corridor, waiting outside Examination Room 19 at the Military Entrance Processing Station in the New Customs House, Denver, CO.

The proceedings began at 5:30 in the morning. Now it's almost noon, it's 53°F and they're standing in only their briefs. The sorting is proceeding slowly. Every twenty minutes or so, the door opens, a white-shirted male nurse pops out, shouts a name. One man pads barefoot through the door. The door slams shut.

Nobody knows exactly what happens inside-- once processed, the specimens are presumably expelled out of a different door and sent on to their eventual destination.

"Eaten up," the whisper comes from further along in the queue.

"Minced and tinned and shipped to Saigon," echoes someone else.

"Gelded and sold as slaves," a third opines grimly.

"*Not* gelded and sold as slaves," amends another. The quip meets with half-hearted laughter. Being drafted for a war is complicated business: complicated, uncomfortable, chilly, and hungry.

Jack stands quietly in line and waits, crawling forward with the others as the white door gobbles up another morsel.

It's mid-afternoon when his name is called.

He walks in.

The room is bleak and neither doctor nor nurse speak much. He's poked and prodded and finally pointed to a wooden step in front of a metal panel. Another panel is set against his chest. It's cold. Jack shudders.

"Stand up straight and still."

He does, holds his breath when they say.

The doctor watches the image on the screen and puffs out in annoyance.

"Fractured vertebrae, spondylosis... What's this? You got pneumothorax?". He stares at Jack.

"Sorry, sir, what?"

"Air in your lung. Likely painful enough to remember."

"Oh, yes, sir. Bad fall while bull-riding."

The doctor turns away with a grimace.

There's no way to know if they're finished with him, so he just stands there on the step, careful not to move nor look anyone in the eye.

"You can step down now," the nurse whispers to him.

He does. He waits for the next orders. But no orders are forthcoming.

The doctor is grumbling under his breath as he scribbles on the form he's filling.

"Sorry bastard, having fun with bulls and getting too busted up to serve his Country," he mutters.

Jack had nothing for breakfast, thin air for lunch, less than four hours' sleep since yesterday, 11 hours of queuing up in the cold, and now he's had enough.

"Due respect, sir, I'd rather get myself killed by a bull than by another *sorry bastard* just like me... Whatever color his skin happens to be."

"Suit yourself. We have no use for trash... Whatever color *their* skin happens to be. You're dismissed."

A sheet of paper covered in spidery script is pushed into his hand.

"Out of here."

Jack turns on his heels, walks out of the back door.

He doesn't slam it.

He finds himself in the courtyard, swept by a nipping breeze. His clothes are somewhere in the dressing room on the other side. Jack draws a breath, raises his chin, and walks on.

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Two months later:

"Army didn't get you?"

"They can't get no use out a me. Too busted up."

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